

*May 20, 2008*

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman Jerry McNerney (CA-11) sent a letter to Veterans Affairs Secretary James B. Peake.

The letter comes on the heels of recent testimony by Secretary Peake in front of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

It was also recently revealed that an employee at a VA facility in Texas issued instructions to specialists to tell veterans that they were not eligible for VA benefits.

The full text of the letter appears below. A PDF of the letter can also be accessed here: [http://McNerney.house.gov/pdf/Peake%20letter\\_05-20-08.pdf](http://McNerney.house.gov/pdf/Peake%20letter_05-20-08.pdf)

May 20, 2008

The Honorable James B. Peake, M.D.  
The Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20540

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for your recent testimony to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding the high rate of veteran suicides.

The staggering number of veterans' suicides, especially among members of the armed services returning from combat, is a national crisis.

There is a clear link between veterans who return from combat with mental health concerns such as severe PTSD and suicide.

Data also shows that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have the highest suicide rate among veterans of all wars.

While I appreciate the steps the VA has taken toward increasing recognition and treatment of suicidal veterans, more must be done.

Additionally, I am concerned that recent actions by high-ranking personnel at the VA seem to indicate a lack of commitment to addressing this crisis.

If we are to truly address this crisis in a comprehensive way, the VA must honestly and forthrightly acknowledge the problem.

Our country's heroes deserve the best care in the world, and we owe them no less than an absolute commitment to their well-being.

The Veterans' Affairs Committee will work with you to provide needed resources, and I in particular look forward to your input.

Sincerely,

Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress